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## VII.—A SOURCE FOR MEDWALL'S *NATURE*

A comparison of Henry Medwall's *Morality Nature*<sup>1</sup> and John Lydgate's poem, *Reson and Sensuallyte*,<sup>2</sup> makes it plain that the two works exhibit remarkable coincidences of character, situation, and language. The general resemblance is obvious enough. In each of the works the plot is allegorical, and in each the hero, who is entitled "Man" in the *Morality* and, impersonally, "I" in the poem, is a type figure representing mankind. This representative of humanity is in each case approached by the lady Nature, who, after giving him a careful explanation of herself and a thorough list of admonitions, finally sends him away to travel through the world. The allegory which follows is of the familiar type in which the life of man is represented by a journey; but the manner in which this journey is undertaken is carefully specialized in the poem, and in this special form is so strikingly reproduced in the play that one may readily conclude that the former supplied much of the material to be found in the latter.

The most remarkable similarities appear in the opening scenes of both works, where Nature converses with the hero preparatory to sending him on his travels. Before presenting the details of my evidence I shall give a very brief synopsis of this preliminary situation in each case.

In the poem the following plot is elaborated on: As I lay in my bed one April morning I was approached by a fair lady, Nature, who is the queen of all creation. She

<sup>1</sup> Edited by J. S. Farmer in "*Lost*" *Tudor Plays*, London, 1907. The play is assigned to a date between 1486 and 1500.

<sup>2</sup> Edited by Ernest Sieper in the Publications of the Early English Text Society.

chided me for staying so long abed, and bade me arise and go forth to visit the world throughout its length and breadth, so that I might learn to praise God. The world, she said, was created solely for man, and therefore man should always restrain himself from vices and follow virtues.<sup>3</sup> I promised to set out, and besought the lady to instruct me how to keep in the right path. She told me that there were two paths through the world, the Way of Sensuality and the Way of Reason, and urged me to keep to the latter.<sup>4</sup> I then took leave of the lady and set out on my journey.

In the play the same situation is presented dramatically, and in much briefer and simpler style. Lady Nature appears and addresses Man in motherly fashion. After giving him the necessary advice and information she tells him that he must prepare to visit the World,<sup>5</sup> and presents him with two guides, Reason and Sensuality, with a warning to keep the latter in his proper place.<sup>6</sup> Man then sets out to visit the World.

I shall now present a series of passages, from poem and play, dealing with the description of Nature and with her advice to Man. In the poem the author describes and ex-

<sup>3</sup> These apparently inconsequential remarks become rational as soon as one considers that the person addressed represents mankind in general.

<sup>4</sup> There is here, as is usual in allegory, a curious mixture of allegorical and literal language. Nature first likens Reason and Sensuality to two roads, then speaks of the conflict in man's nature between his reason and his sensuality, and finally advises her disciple to start out in the company of the guide and adviser Reason and to ignore the advice of the false guide Sensuality.

<sup>5</sup> Here the world is personified.

<sup>6</sup> In both poem and play sensuality is explained by Nature as an essential quality in man, one which enables him to receive many necessary and worthy sensations, but which may easily degenerate into a vice if it is not kept under the control of reason.

plains the lady; in the play she performs the office for herself. As will be seen, the explanation of the functions of Nature, in the two works, is practically the same, corresponding even in minute and unexpected details. The following are only a few of the more striking parallels.

1. Poem (ll. 253-60):

For this is she that is stallyd  
 And the quene of kynde called,  
 For she ys lady and maistresse  
 And vnder god the chefe goddesse  
 The whiche of erthe, this no dout,  
 Hath gouernaunce rounde about,  
 To whom al thing must enclyne.

Play (p. 43):

Th' almighty God that made each creature,  
 As well in heaven as other place earthly,  
 By his wise ordinance hath purveyed me, Nature,  
 To be as minister, under Him immediately,  
 For th' encheson that I should, perpetually,  
 His creatures in such degree maintain  
 As it hath pleased His grace for them to ordain.

2. Poem (ll. 266-283):

                  this lady debonayre  
 Hath sothly syttyng in hir stalle  
 Power of planetes alle  
 And of the brighte sterrys clere,  
 Euerych mevyng in his spere,  
 And tournyng of the firmament  
 From Est in-to the Occydent,  
 Gouernance eke of the hevene,  
 Of Plyades and sterres sevene,  
 That so lustely do shyne,  
 And mevyng of the speres nyne,  
 Which in ther heuenly armonye  
 Make so soote a melodye,  
 By acorde celestiallyl,

In ther concourse eternall,  
 That they be bothe crop and roote  
 Of musyk and of songis soote.

Play (p. 44):

I am causer of such impression  
 As appeareth wondrous to man's sight:  
 As of flames that, from the starry region,  
 Seemeth to fall in times of the night;  
 Some shoot sidelong, and some down right:  
 Which causeth the ignorant to stand in dread  
 That stars do fall, yet falleth there none indeed.<sup>1</sup>

3. Poem (ll. 283-88):

And she, throug her excellence,  
 Be the heuenly influence,  
 And hir pover which ys eterne,  
 The elementez dothe gouerne  
 In ther werkyng ful contrarye.

Play (p. 43):

Atwixt th' elements, that whilom were at strife,  
 I have suaged the old repugnance  
 And knit them together, in manner of alliance.

4. In both poem and play Aristotle is mentioned as the wisest mortal in matters pertaining to nature, but in each case it is shown that his knowledge is perforce limited.

Poem (ll. 308-15):

For which this lady in hir forge  
 Newe and newe ay doth forge  
 Thyngys so mervelous and queynte,  
 And in her labour kan not feynte,

<sup>1</sup>The explanation of celestial control is in the play much simplified, and very obviously adapted to the needs of the humble playgoer. The constant tendency of the Moralities was to simplify and rationalize the material drawn from sources.

But bysy ys euer in oon,  
 That to describe hem euerychon  
 No man alyve hath wytte therto:  
 Aristotiles nor Plato.

Also ll. 337-41:

no man koude nor myght anon  
 Noubre hir yeres euerychon,  
 Nor covnte hem alle in hys devys,  
 Not Aristotle that was so wys.

Play (p. 45):

But, if ye covet now to know th' effect  
 Of things natural, by true conclusion,  
 Counsel with Aristotle, my philosopher elect;  
 Which hath left in books of his tradition  
 How every thing, by heavenly constellation,  
 Is brought to effect; and, in what manner wise,  
 As far as man's wit may naturally comprise.

5. In the poem Nature wears a Mantle of the Four Elements, in which are "wrought in portreyture" all forms in creation. The description of the mantle ends thus (ll. 393-407):

Man was set in the hiest place  
 Towarde heven erecte hys face,  
 Cleymyng hys diwe herytage  
 Be the syght of his visage,  
 To make a demonstracion:  
 He passeth bestys of reson,  
 Hys eye vp-cast ryght as lyne,  
 Where as bestes don enclyne  
 Her hedes to the erthe lowe,  
 To shewe shortely and to knowe  
 By these signes, in sentence,  
 The grete, myghty difference  
 Of man, whos soule ys immortall,  
 And other thinges bestiall.

In the play Dame Nature, with a not unwarranted dis-

trust of Man's allegorical ingenuity, presents the above distinction orally (p. 46):

God wondrously gan devise  
 When he made thee, and gave to thee th' emprise  
 Of all this world, and feoffed thee with all  
 As chief possessioner of things mortal.  
 In token whereof He gave thee upright visage:  
 And gave thee in commandment to lift thine eye  
 Up toward heaven, only for that usage  
 Thou shouldst know Him for thy Lord Almighty,  
 All other beasts as things unworthy;  
 To behold th' earth with grovelling countenance;  
 And be subdued to thine obeisance.

6. In the poem an important part is played by the goddess Diana. She joins the hero after he sets out on his journey, and gives him good advice, to supplement that already bestowed by Nature. The Moralities did not permit goddesses to appear as *dramatis personæ*, and practically never admitted their names in the dialogue. But in *Nature* occurs the following information, given by Dame Nature herself, concerning the power of Diana (p. 44):

I have ordained the goddess Diane,  
 Lady of the sea and every fresh fountain,  
 Which commonly decreaseth when she ginneth wane,  
 And waxeth abundant when she creaseth again.  
 Of ebb and flood she is 'cause certain;  
 And reigneth, as princess, in every isle and town  
 That with the sea is compassed environ.

7. In the course of the conversation Nature tells the hero that he must prepare to make a journey through the world.

Poem (ll. 513-20):

This lady tho, ful wel spayed,  
 Quod she to me: "thow hast wel sayed,  
 For which I wil, in sentence,

That thow yive me Audience;  
 For more y wil the nat respite  
 But that thou goo for to visyte  
 Rounde thys worlde in lengthe and brede.

Play (p. 46):

But, as touching the cause specially  
 Wherefore I have ordained thee this night to appear.  
 It is to put thee in knowledge and memory  
 To what intent thou art ordained to be here.  
 I let thee wit thou art a passenger  
 That hast to do a great and long voyage,  
 And through the world must be thy passage.

8. After this command the conversation proceeds to a discussion of the nature of man, and his rank in the ordered scheme of things. In each case it is shown that he is related, on the one hand, to the things of the world, and, on the other, to God Himself.

Poem (ll. 555-69):

For, by recorde of olde scripture,  
 Hyt founden ys in hys nature,  
 So many propurte notable,  
 That man ys sothely resemblable  
 Vn-to the worlde, this no doute,  
 Whiche ys so grete and rounde aboute.  
 For what this worlde dothe contene,  
 Parcel therof men may sene  
 Within a man ful clerly shyne,  
 As nature doth him enclyne  
 Lych to the goddys immortall  
 That be a-boue celestiall,  
 To whom a man, for hys noblesse,  
 Ys half lyke throgh hys worthynesse.

Also ll. 721-31:

The tother vertu, out of drede,  
 Myn ovne frende, who taketh hede,  
 Ys called, in conclusion,



Vnderstandyng and reson,  
 By whiche of ryght, with-oute shame,  
 Of a man he bereth the name,  
 And through clere intelligence  
 Fro bestes bereth the difference,  
 And of nature ys resemblable  
 To goddys that be pardurable.

Play (p. 47. Here Man himself gives the information):

In every place, wheresoeuer I come,  
 Of each perfection Thy grace hath lent me some;  
 So that I know that creature nowhere  
 Of whose virtue I am not partner.  
 I have, as hath each other element  
 Among other in this world, a common being;  
 . . . . .  
 And, over all this, Thou hast given me virtue  
 Surmounting all other in high perfection:  
 That is, understanding, whereby I may aview  
 And well discern what is to be done;  
 . . . . .  
 And, in this point, I am half angelic;  
 Unto thy heavenly spirits almost egal;  
 Albeit in some part I be to them unlike.

9. In both poem and play Sensuality is accorded an excuse for existing, since he symbolizes Man's ability to see, hear, feel, and so on. But in each case Nature warns Man repeatedly that Sensuality, if he is shown too much favor, will lead him into evil courses. She exhorts Man, therefore, to keep Sensuality in subservience to Reason, who is the true guide in the journey through the world.

10. Finally, in both poem and play, Nature sends her pupil on his journey, with careful directions to follow the guidings of Reason. In the poem this advice is given at some length; in the play it is considerably reduced in volume. The chief point of difference here is that, in the play, Sensuality is allowed to accompany Man, though in

a subordinate capacity. There is an insistent dramatic reason for this, since the chief purpose of the play is to depict, allegorically, the inevitable strife between Sensuality and Reason in man's nature. In this respect, also, the play is much more consistent and more closely knit than the poem. In the latter, Sensuality and Reason are two guides when Nature is interested in the subject of guidance in life, and two roads when she becomes absorbed in the symbolism of paths. Furthermore, after Man sets out on his journey, the poem dispenses with Reason and Sensuality, whose places in the action are presently taken by Diana and Venus, respectively. The play, by retaining Reason and Sensuality throughout, not only simplifies the allegory, but makes it infinitely more dramatic. The two admonitory passages, similar except for the difference explained, I shall now present in part.

Poem (ll. 788-95, 803-11, 817-21, 842-45, 851-56, 870-75):

But Reyson, that governeth al,  
I dar afferme hyt nat in veyn,  
Holdeth the weye, most certeyn,  
Tournyng towarde thorient,  
Most holsom and convenient  
To on entent who haveth grace  
Therein to walkyn and to trace.

. . . . .  
But my counsayl and myn avys  
Ys: that thou be war and wys  
To leve the wey, this holde I best,  
which that ledeth in-to West,  
And go alway, lyst thou be shent,  
The way toward the orient,  
which is a wey most covenable  
And to manne resonable.

. . . . .  
Begynne the weye, ech seson,  
First at vertu and reson,

And fle ech thing that they dispreyse,  
And vp to god thy herte reyse.

But make thy self myghty and stronge  
With all thyn hool entencion  
To holde the weye of reson.

Be ryghtful eke at alle dawes  
Espécial vnto my lawes,  
As reson wil of verray ryght  
And kepe the wel with al thy myght  
Fro thilke wey that ledeth wrong.

Do as reson techeth the,  
And thy wittis hool enclyne  
To rewle the by hir doctrine,  
whom that y love of hert entere  
As myn ovne suster dere.

Play (pp. 46, 48):

Address thyself now towards this journey;  
For, as now thou shalt no longer here abide,  
Lo! here Reason to govern thee in thy way,  
And Sensuality upon thine other side,  
But Reason I depute to be thy chief guide.

Now, forth thy journey! and look well about  
That thou be not deceived by false prodicion.  
Let Reason thee govern in every condition;  
For, if thou do not to his rule incline,  
It will be to thy great mischief and ruin.  
I wot well Sensuality is to thee natural,  
And granted to thee in thy first creation.  
But, notwithstanding, it ought to be over all  
Subdued to Reason, and under his tuition.  
Thou hast now liberty, and needest no mainmission;  
And, if thou abandon thee to passions sensual,  
Farewell thy liberty! thou shalt wax thrall.

Nature now leaves Man, and he goes forth to visit the world. From this point the poem and play show only a general resemblance in motives which are common to nearly

all allegories of the life of man, that is, the vicissitudes of man as the result of his alternate acceptance of good and evil allegorical companions. The latter part of the poem, with its resplendent goddesses, its fair garden, and its great symbolic game of chess, could furnish no suggestions for the Morality, which, given its starting-point, always followed a comparatively severe and definite line of action. But this starting-point was precisely what the Morality playwright sought—this new point of view from which to observe the never-ending conflict between virtues and vices in the heart of man. That Medwall selected his point of view with some care from Lydgate's poem seems reasonably certain.

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